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Chairman: Mr. Asadi (Islamic Republic of Iran)

Contents

Agenda item 95: Operational activities for development

Panel discussion on "United Nations Development Assistance Framework"

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 95: Operational activities for development (A/53/85, A/53/154, A/53/186, A/53/226 and Add.1-4 and A/53/363)

1. **Mr. Desai** (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/53/226 and Add.1-4), said that an important and relatively new element had been added to the review process: evaluations of the impact of operational activities. There were three aspects of those evaluations: the first, which had received the most attention in previous years, concerned decisions on matters such as national implementation, the programme approach, common premises and the harmonization of programming cycles; the second involved an evaluation of the programmes of the various organizations by their own executive boards, and the third was the above-mentioned impact evaluation, which included the activities of the various programmes and had focused on an aspect common to all of them, capacity-building.

2. In recent years, the primary characteristic of operational activities for development had been intersectoral integration, through which activities carried out in different areas were part of an integrated whole whose elements were mutually supportive. For example, environmental issues were linked to those related to poverty, which were linked to the interests of groups such as children or women; they, in turn, were increasingly closely related to the issue of human rights. That explained why integration was so important; it was necessary both at the country level and at Headquarters and involved links between the various areas covered by programmes. For example, at the country level, the thematic groups which had been established were essentially basic coordination groups. At Headquarters, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) had been established in order to ensure that coordination was adequately integrated.

3. One important issue highlighted by the recent crisis in the financial markets and the resulting serious macroeconomic problems was the fact that an excessive focus on long-term development could be counter-productive unless it was reflected in short-term policy decisions. Recognition of that fact should lead to some type of dialogue between the United Nations and, in particular, the Bretton Woods institutions.

4. Another important factor which must be reflected in policies concerning operational activities for development was the relationship between the normative and operational aspects of the work of the United Nations. The funds and programmes and the specialized agencies focused their basic capacities on the implementation of decisions which had been taken jointly at the major United Nations conferences and were of great interest to Member States. The desire to ensure that those jointly-agreed objectives were achieved at the level of individual countries must be balanced with the requirement that activities carried out at the country level should reflect the specific characteristics of the country and be based on their needs. The United Nations could not consider all national priorities in every case; the Organization had certain sets of capacities which corresponded increasingly to the priorities established at the major conferences of the current decade, and everything possible had been done to ensure that those capacities corresponded to national priorities through the use of country-level programming mechanisms such as the recently established United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in order to provide a solid basis for coordination.

5. Lastly, it was important to note that everything that had been done to improve the coordination and consistency of United Nations activities would be useless unless the necessary resources were made available for operations. The executive boards had accomplished a great deal in the area of funding strategies, but much remained to be done in order to ensure predictable, assured funding of activities within the United Nations mandate and of efforts to achieve the ambitious goals set at United Nations conferences and to meet the needs of developing countries. The acquisition of resources for operational activities and modalities for the utilization thereof required continual efforts by intergovernmental bodies.

6. **Ms. Bellamy** (Executive Director, of the United Nations Children's Fund), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on progress on the implementation of the World Declaration and Plan of Action from the World Summit for Children (A/53/186), said that, at that historic Summit, 181 countries had committed themselves to protecting the lives and interests of children and promoting the full development of their potential.

7. The World Summit had been the single most important international initiative in support of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an instrument which had achieved almost universal adherence, having been ratified by 191 countries, which had thereby acknowledged

their obligation to uphold the right of children to protection, full development and participation.

8. The eight years since the World Summit for Children and the entry into force of the Convention had seen more progress on behalf of children than any other period. The report of the Secretary-General included statistics on the remarkable achievements in the reduction of child mortality, immunization, programmes to combat respiratory infections and reduce crippling iodine deficiency disorders, improvements in breast-feeding and early childhood care, access to safe water, the reduction of vitamin A deficiency and the narrowing of gender gaps in education. Those were remarkable achievements which would have been impossible without a partnership between Governments, donors, international institutions and broad sectors of civil society, as evidenced by the reports submitted by States Parties to the Convention and reviewed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

9. Yet, in many ways, the work had hardly begun since progress had been uneven across countries and regions: every year, an estimated 12 million children under the age of five died of preventable causes; some 130 million children, 60 per cent of them girls, did not attend school; an estimated 160 million children were dangerously malnourished; 1.4 billion people had no access to safe water; and 2.7 billion people lacked adequate sanitation. There were some 250 million child labourers, and millions of children were fighting as soldiers in wars.

10. The prospects of solving those problems were diminished by the deepening of poverty, accelerated by the spread of the current global economic crisis, the shameful decline in official development assistance (ODA), the growing number of humanitarian crises involving children, and the explosion of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the devastating effects of which threatened to undermine the hard-won gains on behalf of children. Although the AIDS mortality rate had declined in affluent countries as a result of new drug therapies, the disease continued to cut a swath through vast areas of sub-Saharan Africa and East and South Asia, where people had no access to the new therapies.

11. The solutions to those grim realities were known and their estimated cost, which was less than 1 per cent of global output, was well within the means of the international community. The end-of-decade goals established by the World Summit for Children could not be achieved without a solemn recommitment by Governments to the goals, together with sustained efforts to build national capacity, reform of national laws to take account of the rights of women and children and institutional arrangements for

strengthening the implementation of those rights. In all of those undertakings, the support of the international community was essential.

12. The process of accelerating progress towards the achievement of the Summit's end-of-decade goals must begin with a review of progress at the national level between now and the year 2000. Serious consideration must also be given in that context to the Secretary-General's initiative to promote the coordinated follow-up to the major United Nations Conferences and Summits. The special session of the General Assembly in 2001 to review the achievement of the goals of the World Summit for Children offered a unique opportunity to mobilize the broadest possible movement for children's rights and to identify updated goals for the first decades of the new century. The time had come to make good on the commitments undertaken and to guarantee the right of every child to a full and healthy life.

13. **Mr. Ohiorhenuan** (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the integration of economic and technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC and ECDC) in the operational activities of the United Nations system (A/53/226/Add.4), said that, in elaborating the report, the Secretary-General had taken account of the results of the consultations held with the States Members and various organizations of the United Nations system.

14. He highlighted the five parts of the report, drawing particular attention to the conclusion that, despite the efforts made by various organizations and agencies, economic and technical cooperation among developing countries had not been optimally integrated in the operational activities of the United Nations system. That was so for a variety of reasons, including the persistence of attitudinal barriers against that form of cooperation, a lack of awareness of the potential of those modalities of cooperation and the inadequacy of the resources allocated for such cooperation.

15. The specific recommendations made to the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system with a view to strengthening the integration of economic and technical cooperation activities in the operational activities of the United Nations system included the following: seek to mainstream and institutionalize TCDC and ECDC by integrating those modalities in their organizational policy, operations manuals and directives and in their programming arrangements; seek to identify suitable opportunities to promote joint cooperation arrangements to which United Nations organizations and agencies could bring their various sectoral competencies in support of multisectoral initiatives;

seek to implement Economic and Social Council resolution 1992/41 to ensure that TCDC and ECDC were given "first consideration" in the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of their operational activities; integrate TCDC and ECDC in programme and coordination frameworks, such as the country strategy note, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the UNDP country cooperation framework and other instruments and mechanisms employed by the United Nations organizations and agencies in carrying out their programmes; establish closer contact with organizations in the developing world; seek to foster the increased involvement of the private sector in the developing countries in TCDC and ECDC activities; and apply in a consistent manner the revised guidelines for technical cooperation among developing countries prepared by the Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (SU/TCDC) within UNDP, on the basis of consultations with the various organizations and agencies, subject to any observations or amendments made by the General Assembly.

16. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (A/53/363), said that during the previous year the Fund's work had been focused on the Secretary-General's programme of reform of the United Nations system and on the human rights agenda based on two approaches that emerged from its mandate: its role as an innovator, whereby it highlighted emerging or silent issues that were critical to the achievement of gender equality, and its role as a catalyst, whereby it sought out partnerships to which each partner could bring its comparative advantage to benefit the empowerment of women.

17. The reform agenda had benefited the work of UNIFEM. There had been a significant increase in the activities in which the field offices of the Fund were involved to assist in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, to develop a common country database, to identify and address feminized poverty, especially in a globalizing economy and in a situation characterized by economic crises, and to create new spaces for political participation by women. Those efforts had brought together civil society, Governments, donors and United Nations agencies to engage in policy dialogue and to forge effective strategies and the benefits of that type of coordination to Governments and communities were becoming clearer.

18. There had been widespread interest on the part of Governments and civil society in the area of human rights and the Fund had thus focused its programmes on

maximizing interest in innovative strategies for eliminating violence against women. In that context, the Fund had launched campaigns to eliminate violence against women in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

19. In its efforts to mainstream gender at the country level, the Fund had learnt many valuable lessons. All of the issues that had been debated in the months leading up to the announcement of the Secretary-General's reform package were manifest in the Fund's collaborative activities. The challenge that faced the Fund was related in part to testing new approaches and drawing its partners into those efforts. To that end, two of the key mechanisms being developed were, firstly, the expansion of the Fund's field network to increase the gender expertise available to the resident coordinator system and, secondly, the Fund's participation in the work of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and in the gender sub-group of the United Nations Development Group.

20. She saw the expansion of the network of gender expertise as supporting United Nations reform and UNDAF and promoting good gender mainstreaming practices in the work of the United Nations on the follow-up to the global conferences at the country level. The ultimate objective was to increase support to countries in implementing the commitments undertaken at the United Nations global conferences on the empowerment of women and gender equality. Over the following two years, the Fund's experience in monitoring and assessing the ways in which the expanded network supported United Nations funds, programmes and agencies at the country level would be a critical component of its work.

21. The Fund's challenge with regard to UNDAF was to ensure that gender emerged as a key cross-cutting issue. It would pursue the idea of a gender audit at the country level, once all the gender advisers were in place. It was also convening a meeting of the undg sub-group on gender, which had developed a strategy to feed into UNDAF, and was currently working with the members of the sub-group to develop an agency-by-agency resource map that would allow the Fund to know exactly where and what gender expertise existed at any given moment. That would allow the United Nations country teams quick access to such expertise and enable the gender advisers to benefit from the sharing of ideas and experiences.

22. More than at any other time in history, gender equality was an achievable goal. Achievement of that goal, however, was closely tied to the support that was received from the United Nations system as a whole, from Governments and from civil society.

23. **Mr. Ouedraogo** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, entitled "Fellowships in the United Nations system" (A/53/154), the objective of which was to identify major management and coordination issues relating to the implementation of United Nations system fellowship programmes and the contribution of those programmes to capacity-building, said that an attempt had been made to propose common terminology for "fellowships" in order to facilitate the preparation of reports. While the recommendation made in that regard might not meet the approval of all concerned, it should be pointed out that the inherent difficulty of that exercise probably explained why secretariats had never reached an agreement on the subject.
24. As a matter of fact, the current report arrived at the same conclusion as another report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/1976/1): the general term "fellowship" covered a wide range of training and learning activities that did not lend themselves to standardized labelling. However, there was a consensus on the need to submit data in an agreed format, in particular when system-wide reporting on fellowships data was made by the Inter-Agency Procurement Services Office in its annual statistical report.
25. The Unit believed that it was more important to ensure that all organizations of the system agreed on the requirements and objectives of any fellowship programme, which must include the following: the activity for which a fellowship has been granted should be in response to nationally approved human resources development plans and policies of the beneficiary country; the selection process should ensure that fellowships were granted only to candidates who had the required qualifications; and all stakeholders should endeavour to ensure that the related training was relevant and had the desired impact.
26. The data provided by the organizations for the period 1990-1995 indicated new trends in fellowship programmes, such as an increased emphasis on short- and medium-term training, a shift in placements from developed to developing countries, greater regionalization of placements and a growing sensitivity to the gender perspective, although improvements could be made in that respect through a more proactive policy in favour of women applicants.
27. Other developments concerned the impact of national execution on the implementation of fellowship programmes and sources of funding for such programmes. In almost all agencies, there was convincing evidence that the number of fellowships granted under national execution had increased and would continue to do so as a result of General Assembly resolution 47/199. Some organizations, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Telecommunication Union and the World Health Organization, relied heavily on their regular budgets to fund their fellowship programmes, while others had managed to find other sources of financing. Maintaining the level of fellowship programmes would depend increasingly on the ability of organizations to find new sources of funding.
28. While all organizations were convinced that their fellowship programmes had contributed to capacity-building in the beneficiary countries, it was often difficult to assess the real impact of such programmes. In addition to the well-known "brain drain" phenomenon, the report highlighted another factor that the Inspectors called "brain neglect", as a result of which well-trained and competent professionals were not used effectively in their countries' development programmes.
29. In short, the impact of fellowship programmes on capacity-building was a responsibility shared by the different stakeholders. Nominating countries must undertake to use the newly acquired knowledge and skills of the trainees, and the organizations of the United Nations system could contribute to that effort by maintaining and updating data banks on local expertise, to which other development partners would also have access. In that context, evaluation should be considered as an important tool without which the impact of fellowship programmes could be measured only indirectly.
30. The recommendations contained in the report, most of which met with the concurrence of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), were action-oriented and, if approved, could be conducive to more effective fellowship programmes. A major difference of opinion related to the future of the United Nations Education and Training Programme for Southern Africa (UNETSPA). Some believed that, when its current term expired in April 1999, UNETSPA should become an integral part of the regular programme of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in South Africa. However, the Unit considered that, with the consent of the host country, UNETSPA, by capitalizing on its long experience and network of contacts with South Africa, could become common placement and supervising unit under the authority of the Resident Coordinator. That would be a meaningful contribution to the policy of common services advocated by the Secretary-General.
31. In the Unit's opinion, the report contained two important points: first, the role that the United Nations should play in fellowship programmes and, secondly, the question of inter-agency coordination in that area. With

regard to coordination, the Unit had recommended that the inter-agency secretariat, which was based in Geneva, and the biennial meeting of fellowship officers should be maintained.

32. **Mr. Hidayat** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the triennial policy review of United Nations operational activities for development could not be considered in isolation from the precarious situation of the world economy at a time when the forces of globalization and market liberalization were relentlessly changing economic processes. Regrettably, globalization's promise of prosperity for all was becoming increasingly doubtful. Globalization had exposed developing countries to grave risks and had caused setbacks ranging from slowdowns in economic activity to outright economic collapse in what was the most serious financial and economic crisis in the past three decades.

33. In the midst of such turmoil, at a time of increasing needs and demands, concessionary resource flows to developing countries had declined significantly. Far from moving towards the agreed target of 0.7 per cent, official development assistance (ODA) was steadily declining and had fallen from 64 per cent of total resource flows to the developing countries in 1994 to 22 per cent in 1996.

34. In contrast to that contraction, private capital flows had increased rapidly. The developing countries were often told that they should rely more on private capital flows and that ODA should be only a complement to those capital flows. However, the problem was that most low-income developing countries could not attract adequate foreign direct investment, let alone private commercial loans, and were therefore seriously affected by the decline in ODA, on which they had come to depend.

35. For all developing countries, particularly those with little access to private capital flows, United Nations operational activities for development assumed even greater relevance. The triennial comprehensive policy review offered an opportunity to assess the performance of those activities at a difficult time and to search for the best practices both to implement the mandates and to make further improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of United Nations operational activities. It was essential that such activities should retain their universality, their voluntary and grant nature, their neutrality and their multilateral orientation. They should also be conducted at the request of the developing countries and in accordance with their policy priorities for development. Developing countries should therefore be helped to take on the leading role in advancing and managing their own development

processes. Operational activities were an important component of external financing for development and the triennial policy review provided a good opportunity to reinforce the role of the United Nations in that regard. It should be used to confront the severe shortfall in resources suffered by the Organization and to ensure that future funding for operational activities for development was put on a more predictable, assured and continuous basis.

36. The steps already taken by the executive boards of United Nations funds and programmes should be built upon to arrest and reverse the decline in core resources and enhance the effectiveness of operational activities in various ways, including a substantial increase in their funding that would commensurate with the increasing needs of developing countries. If the current deplorable situation was allowed to continue, there would be a drastic reduction in United Nations operational activities. That would run counter to the basic principles and objectives of the United Nations and would have a devastating impact on the development efforts of the developing countries. Operational activities had been designed to help those efforts and should not deviate from that goal. The triennial review should strengthen those objectives and avoid introducing any concept alien to the traditional country-driven activities.

37. The Group of 77 and China commended the United Nations system on the progress made over the past three years, particularly with regard to the resident coordinator system. It was, however, the recipient Governments that had the primary responsibility for coordinating — on the basis of national strategies and priorities — all types of external assistance, including that provided by multilateral institutions. That point should be underlined in the triennial comprehensive review. In that context, the pilot phase of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) should promote a country-driven response, in conformity with national priorities, as expressed in country strategy notes or relevant development plans. Moreover, only preliminary lessons could be drawn for the triennial review exercise from UNDAF, which was being introduced on a pilot basis in 18 countries and would be subject to assessment in 1998. Ultimately, it would be meaningful for recipient countries only if it led to increased resource mobilization.

38. It was important to stress the growing need to incorporate the regional dimension in operational activities for development and for resident coordinators to secure greater involvement of regional commissions in UNDAF.

39. In an era of globalization it was essential to promote South-South cooperation. In connection with the twentieth

anniversary of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action, the Group of 77 and China welcomed the proposal for a United Nations day for South-South cooperation and the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report on strengthening the integration of economic and technical cooperation among developing countries in the operational activities of the United Nations system. The United Nations Development Programme, moreover, should substantially increase the allocation of core resources to enable the Special Unit for Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries to carry out the mandates of the General Assembly. The matter should be given due consideration in the triennial comprehensive policy review. There was also a need to increase the procurement of goods and services from the developing countries for United Nations operational activities. That issue should be given proper consideration in the triennial comprehensive review; it was of the utmost relevance in efforts to promote South-South cooperation and national execution, which were at the very core of United Nations operational activities for development.

The meeting was suspended at 4.10 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.

Panel discussion on "United Nations Development Assistance Framework"

40. **Ms. Sadik** (Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund) welcomed the opportunity for an exchange of views with members of the Second Committee on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system; the two were related.

41. She reiterated the total commitment of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to the United Nations reforms and to close cooperation both with other organizations in the system and with civil society, with the aim of responding to the needs of the countries in which UNFPA worked. She intended to comment on only some of the issues under consideration, most particularly on the harmonization of programme cycles. Although some progress had been made, there was a need for some adjustments and much remained to be done. The situation had been carefully reviewed within the United Nations Development Group and strict instructions were being issued that a definite plan to achieve harmonization should be drawn up.

42. Harmonization was necessary in order to achieve more common programming approaches, whether through common country analyses, country strategy notes, UNDAF

or monitoring and evaluation. Any of those processes gained immensely in value if programme cycles were harmonized among themselves and, even more importantly, with the planning cycles of Governments.

43. Streamlining and harmonization might also involve the elimination of some programming processes. For example, UNFPA had decided that the population assessment of a country could be simplified or dropped if the common country assessment had, in its view, been properly carried out.

44. Countries should also be helped to develop the data systems that they needed, not only for United Nations programmes but also for the management of their own programmes, with the aim both of reducing workload and demands on national counterparts and the offices of the United Nations itself and of delivering more effective assistance to meet national needs and priorities. Those objectives were sometimes overlooked and the intended results were not always achieved. It was important that all processes should be simplified and that mechanisms should be devised to reduce staff time spent on reform-related processes.

45. With regard to the common country assessment it was useful to recall that the concept had been developed at the initiative of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy in 1997. It included the selection of a common set of meaningful indicators, the development of a common database and a common assessment of country needs and priorities, in consultation with Governments. Those were essential steps leading up to UNDAF and should also be helpful for country strategy notes.

46. Field offices were already experimenting with common country assessments and, although the quality varied, efforts were moving in the right direction. The common indicators would need to be limited to a sufficient but manageable list that could provide baseline data. Above all, national capacity in data collection, analysis and use should be built up and strengthened.

47. The common country assessments should be carried out as a collective exercise among United Nations country teams and national counterparts and should necessarily involve the participation of Governments, all relevant national groups and all parts of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions and the Bretton Woods institutions. In future, common country assessments must become a standard feature of the harmonized programme cycles and a precursor to the preparation of UNDAF and individual country programmes.

48. In the formulation of common country assessments, country strategy notes and UNDAF, greater consideration should be given to the follow-up to conferences and to how the United Nations system and the donor community in general could assist the country concerned in achieving goals agreed in the series of conferences. That implied a more active use by the country offices and by government staff of the various materials produced by the ACC Task Forces as a follow-up to conferences. It was sometimes clear that, within the United Nations country teams and at various levels of the organizations of the United Nations system, there was not sufficient understanding about the conferences. Therefore, briefing and training exercises were needed in order to facilitate the implementation of the goals agreed at those conferences, adapted to national needs and priorities.
49. It was also vital to have a resident coordinator system that functioned well, was transparent and impartial to ensure that the resident coordinators had the trust of all and looked after the interests of all organizations equally.
50. Recognizing the centrality of funding and resources was a responsibility shared by programme and donor countries. It implied both a better utilization of existing resources as well as the imperative of mobilizing additional resources. It must be ensured that there was a more predictable, stable and steady increase in resources. In that regard, she greatly appreciated the statement made by Ms. Eveline Herfkens, Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, before the Second Committee and hoped that other donor countries would emulate that example.
51. **Ms. Bellamy** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund) said that, for the sake of brevity, she would refer only to UNDAF.
52. Eighteen countries had been selected to take part in the initial pilot phase of the UNDAF process and the specialized agencies and Bretton Woods institutions had also been invited to take part therein. In nearly all cases, the resident coordinator system had also participated. It had also been agreed that Mali and Viet Nam would serve as pilot sites for review of the interface between UNDAF and the World Bank's country assistance strategies.
53. During the last two months, an assessment team made up of representatives from the United Nations and four agencies, namely, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had reviewed the UNDAF experience to date. In addition, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) had commissioned an independent review by an external panel of three high-level experts who were independent of the United Nations but were familiar with the issues. Those two assessments had been part of a major review of UNDAF that had been carried out by various agencies and inter-agency bodies, three country teams and various Governments. In addition, UNICEF had conducted its own internal assessment of the UNDAF pilot phase involving representatives from the pilot countries.
54. It should be recalled, as the triennial policy review stated explicitly, that the introduction of UNDAF responded to the concerns of Governments, as expressed in previous triennial policy resolutions, for greater collaboration, cohesion and complementarity among United Nations agencies. UNDAF responded to national priorities and commitments as expressed in national development plans, international conventions and the plans of action of international summits and conferences. UNDAF must remain a process and document developed and agreed at the country level.
55. The strikingly similar overall conclusions and recommendations that had emerged from the assessment exercises included the following: UNDAF should be a strategic instrument and the primary United Nations instrument for responding to a country's priorities and development challenges and should be prepared with the concurrence and full and active participation of Governments; the United Nations global agenda, including follow-up to the international conferences and the eradication of poverty, should form the core of the UNDAF agenda, always in support of country needs and national priorities; UNDAF should strengthen the capacity of host Governments to implement their development programmes and strengthen the relationship between the United Nations and host Governments; UNDAF should contain provision for monitoring and evaluation in accordance with agreed indicators; UNDAF required a clear statement of host Governments' priorities through a country strategy note or similar document and a common country assessment should precede its preparation.
56. The UNDAF pilot process had played a tremendous role in strengthening and energizing the many aspects of inter-agency collaboration. UNDAF had provided the basis for the historic first joint session of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF, and UNDAF had formed the core of the discussion in the operational activities segment of the Economic and Social Council with the United Nations country teams of Guatemala and Mozambique.
57. As a key mechanism for efficient and cost-effective United Nations coordination, UNDAF also had an important

role in the achievement of the end-decade goals of the World Summit for Children and in the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Within the United Nations Development Group, the ad hoc group on the right to development, jointly chaired by the United Nations Centre for Human Rights (UNCHR) and UNICEF, a unique opportunity existed to promote a national dynamic in the process of development that was both informed by human rights imperatives and designed to enhance their realization.

58. The achievement of those objectives — the success of operational activities, the speedy implementation of the actions called for in the triennial policy review and the full implementation of the Secretary-General's reforms — hinged on a key factor, the availability of adequate resources, which implied an early reversal of the overall decline in resources for development. In that connection, it was vital that the General Assembly should support action to ensure adequate, predictable, sustainable and increased funding through voluntary contributions, especially for general resources, which constituted the essence of multilateralism.

59. **Mr. Speth** (Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Chairman of the United Nations Development Group) said that, in its work concerning the comprehensive triennial policy review of operational activities for development, UNDG had followed the objectives and mandates contained in General Assembly resolutions 47/199 and 50/120 and the principles contained in the Secretary-General's reform proposals.

60. In line with the division of tasks established within the Group, UNDP focused on the management and functioning of the resident coordinator system. In August 1997, specific guidelines were issued requesting resident coordinators, *inter alia*, to ensure that all agencies were fully and equitably represented at the national level; to devote their time to coordination and to always give priority to the system even if there were conflicts with the functions that they performed for another agency, including UNDP; and to indicate when they were overwhelmed with other tasks so that a deputy resident coordinator could be appointed to deal with those tasks (that was being done in over 12 countries).

61. Various aspects of the system had been improved. The resident coordinator was drawn from an expanded pool of candidates from the United Nations system. Five years previously, only one resident coordinator had been from outside UNDP. In 1998, 30 per cent of the intake of resident coordinators originated in organizations other than UNDP. Efforts were being made to increase the proportion of

women. A new selection procedure involving greater participation, transparency and consultation had been agreed; it would begin to be implemented in 1999. The performance of resident coordinators would be appraised and all members of their country teams would be covered by the appraisal process later. The inputs of the entire United Nations system and the self-evaluation of resident coordinators had been included in the annual reports on the resident coordinator system. The post profile for resident coordinators had been reviewed and, in conformity with General Assembly resolutions 50/227 and 51/240 and the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/950), cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions was being intensified and efforts would be made to distribute responsibilities between those institutions and the United Nations.

62. There were still some outstanding issues. They included identifying cost-effective ways of increasing the capacity of the office of the resident coordinator; refining reporting systems in order to create more productive information-sharing and experience exchange between country teams and headquarters; promoting procedures for disseminating the best practices in coordination; and examining how resident coordinators and country teams could be assisted to identify and respond to incipient humanitarian crises.

63. The United Nations Development Group was concerned that donors, especially the majority of the members of the Group of 7, had reduced official development assistance. All the work of the United Nations (peace and security, humanitarian questions, drugs, human rights and democratization) was based on the development platform it had built throughout the world which had earned the trust and affection of its recipients. If that platform was not bolstered with the necessary resources, it would collapse.

64. **Mr. Powell** (Director, Division of Strategies and Policies of the World Food Programme) said that, consistent with the overall objectives of the Secretary-General's reform proposals, the United Nations was moving in the direction of formulating and implementing more strategic approaches to its operational activities in both the development and humanitarian fields. For those countries and regions experiencing complex emergencies, efforts were under way to strengthen the consolidated appeals process into a more effective inter-agency programming process for identifying humanitarian priorities, elaborating plans of action and presenting resource requirements. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) was working on the formulation and implementation of a strategic framework to guide analysis and action in countries in or recovering from

crisis, where the United Nations assumed a leadership role in conflict resolution and peace-building efforts.

65. In accordance with the division of responsibility established in the United Nations Development Group, WFP had focused on some specific aspects of UNDAF. One such aspect was the linkage between relief and development. Often, the provision of development and emergency assistance coexisted in the same country. In the Sudan, for example, the Programme provided food assistance to young children attending primary school in one part of the country while it was responding at the same time in another region to a major humanitarian crisis linked to civil strife and recurring natural disasters. In recognition of the widespread disruption to lives and livelihoods which often accompanied natural disasters, WFP was working to incorporate prevention, preparedness and mitigation measures more systematically into its development activities. While it was important to link experience and capacities related to relief and development, the practicality of doing so had been hampered by a number of factors such as the conflict between the short-term perspective of relief and longer-term focus of development; the fact that humanitarian and development organizations often did not coordinate their work in the field and failed to integrate their strategies; the unpredictability of relief assistance from year to year; the dramatic decline in the level of development funding available and the difficulty of securing resources for rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery. Many people supported development activities in disaster-prone areas and assumed, therefore, that such activities must have a mitigating effect when disaster struck. However, the dynamic nature of natural disasters and the diversity of the situations that they created for the people called for specific mitigation objectives in order to improve the effectiveness of prevention efforts. It was better to prevent destitution than to alleviate hunger; the timing of when assistance was provided could be crucial. The lines between emergency relief, recovery and development were not as distinct as it had been previously believed and situations changed with rapidity from one category to the other. While everyone recognized the importance of disaster preparedness and prevention, the conditions imposed by donors complicated matters, since donors allocated funds for specific budget lines and agencies.

66. The issues that were being addressed in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) were similar to those faced by national Governments. By adopting the Framework, the United Nations system had given itself the wherewithal to make real progress, learning as it proceeded.

67. With regard to resources and funding, the United Nations had begun a process of reforms at a time when donors were tending to cut back on funding. The priority objectives of the planned operational activities of the United Nations organizations should therefore be clearly structured in UNDAF, and there should be a clear division of labour that highlighted the comparative advantages of each organization. It would be necessary to convince the United Nations system, Governments and international donors that all the money spent in an UNDAF programme of activities was well spent. However, that was no substitute for an adequate level of funding for operational activities for development. The problem of declining resources was compounded by the lack of predictability in the timing of their availability and the increasing tendency for donors to earmark their contributions. It must be recognized that, within more integrated programme approaches, such as UNDAF and the consolidated appeals process, the effectiveness of operational activities of individual organizations became much more dependent on the availability of resources for a programme as a whole. The more an organization depended on another organization with which it carried out complementary activities, the more at risk it would be if its partner was prevented from implementing its activities owing to a lack of resources or capacity. Solving the problems through collaborative efforts within the United Nations system was not always easy.

68. More coordinated approaches for programming within the United Nations system offered opportunities for the mainstreaming of gender issues within the operational activities of development and humanitarian organizations. For example, WFP cooperated with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to support women in crisis situations, with UNICEF and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to increase the primary school enrolment rate among girls, and with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to enhance staff capacity to address gender issues. The United Nations Development Group had sought to incorporate the gender perspective into UNDAF, which was reflected in the UNDAF guidelines and the indicators for monitoring and accountability.

69. Much more work was required to examine the linkages between UNDAF, the consolidated appeals process and the strategic frameworks with a view to ensuring the sustainability of actions initiated and finding ways of dealing with practical problems faced on a daily basis. So far, assessment had focused on process; emphasis must now be placed on the substantive and operational dimensions of the

various strategic processes. The office of the United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security were currently discussing those and other pending matters.

70. **The Chairman** invited delegations to ask questions and make comments.

71. **Ms. Wörgetter** (Austria) asked what progress the United Nations funds and programmes had made in harmonizing country programmes and decentralizing and delegating authority in the field in order to facilitate the implementation of a process like UNDAF, which took place in the field.

72. **Mr. Verbeek** (Netherlands), referring to the remark by the representative of WFP that emphasis should be placed on the substantive and operational dimensions of the various strategies, said that his question related to the substantive aspect of coordination. Since one of the main objectives of UNDAF was to ensure follow-up of the major United Nations conferences, he enquired whether UNDAF was also involved in coordinating activities at the headquarters level; in other words, he wished to know whether the funds and programmes considered the programmes of work and annual reports together at the headquarters level and whether they provided joint assistance to work carried out in the field in order to determine, assess and select priorities for following up conferences. He also asked whether there were thematic groups at the headquarters level similar to those at the field level, and he wished to know how the thematic groups at the two levels related to each other.

73. **Mr. Kvalheim** (Norway) said that, as the participants in the panel discussion had pointed out, the availability of resources was important for the functioning of UNDAF. The way in which voluntary contributions were used was also important. The preliminary assessments seemed to raise two questions: lack of participation of Governments in the process, and increased volume of work as a result of the many operational initiatives from previous years. UNDAF must rationalize and consolidate some of those initiatives. The main obstacles to greater participation at the country level should be indicated and a consolidated approach should be adopted.

74. **Mr. Cabactulan** (Philippines) asked whether, in accordance with the pilot projects that UNDAF had carried out in a number of countries, it could be reasonably assumed that the country strategy note could be used to accelerate or facilitate results, or whether it was advisable to dispense with that immediate and voluntary resource in favour of a mechanism that was more related to the process. Given the

cost of coordination, he asked whether, if the necessary resources were unobtainable, it would be worth proceeding with UNDAF at the risk of jeopardizing its effectiveness.

75. **Mr. Pérez** (Dominican Republic) expressed his thanks for the assistance his country had received from the international community to alleviate the effects of Hurricane George, and asked the speakers what action the various United Nations humanitarian programmes had taken to assist the countries affected by the hurricane.

76. **Mr. Speth** (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme), replying to questions, said that while the participants in the panel discussion considered decentralization to be very important, there were still difficulties in putting it into practice, particularly in the specialized agencies. With regard to harmonization of programming cycles, the United Nations Development Group had drawn up a plan for reaching that objective within three years; so far, harmonization had been achieved in 32 per cent of the countries. He attached paramount importance to that process which, together with the implementation of common country assessments, would be an adequate prelude to the success of UNDAF.

77. Follow-up to major conferences was, without a doubt, the main objective and guiding principle of UNDAF. The problem was to determine how each country wished to proceed; that was part of the dialogue that had been initiated with Governments and actors in civil society, and it would also be the subject of future annual reports. The United Nations Development Group had studied those reports to ensure that they included that question.

78. With regard to the thematic groups, four inter-agency task forces at the headquarters level provided guidance to country teams on follow-up to conferences, and the United Nations Development Group had set up thematic groups that dealt with the issues of gender, the right to development and human rights; thus, coordination was maintained also at the headquarters level.

79. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework should be able to count on the full participation of Governments, the principal partners of the United Nations country teams for the duration of the process. Governments should take part in preparation from the very beginning, as well as in the common country assessment; that was why consultative mechanisms should be established in the UNDAF process in order to ensure Governments' support and cooperation. The assessment of UNDAF that had just been carried out emphasized those conclusions.

80. **Mr. Lundborg** (Sweden) said the entire UNDAF process was geared towards a country-driven response by the United Nations system. Nevertheless, the statement by the representative of the Group of 77 and China had revealed that there were some reservations in that regard. His delegation was aware that some countries had welcomed the UNDAF process, since they believed that it would facilitate a more integrated response to their needs. In that connection, he wished to know whether difficulties had been encountered in other countries in the consideration of common country assessments and the establishment of the UNDAF process. While it was not easy to identify the countries in which difficulties had been encountered, his delegation considered that a reply to that question would be of great importance to the debate and negotiations on the resolution that would be adopted on the subject.
81. **Mr. Amaziane** (Morocco), referring to the group of organizations that were taking part in the panel discussion, wondered whether they were truly representative of the problems encountered in the field. He would have preferred to see on the podium representatives of other bodies of the United Nations system that were facing problems, so that the discussion could have been about what was not working well.
82. In the report on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/53/226), no clear positions had been taken. He had the impression that it was a negotiated report, an agreed text in which positions were expressed with extreme caution; on the eve of the third millennium, a different text might have been expected. For example, according to the report, little progress had been made in rationalizing programming procedures. Given the fact that the complexity of programming procedures was the Gordian knot of operational activities implemented at the country level, the report should have indicated why so little progress had been made in that area. Likewise, the report contained a small section dealing with official development assistance (ODA) in which it was noted that ODA resources had declined, but the reasons for that decline were not given.
83. The report referred to new concepts that were being put into practice in connection with the country strategy notes, and he hoped that the necessary resources would be made available to implement that new approach.
84. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that, while Bangladesh had a favourable opinion of the UNDAF process, it considered that the enthusiasm of the participants in the panel discussion was premature: it was necessary to wait and see what the results of that process were. He agreed with the representative of Morocco that it was necessary to inform Member States of difficulties that had been encountered. It was also important that the process should proceed gradually. His delegation was concerned that the next triennial review might begin discussing another framework, design or strategy instead of strengthening the UNDAF process.
85. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework should not only help harmonize country programmes, but should also promote a standard-setting dialogue between development partners in the field. If that dialogue had taken place, he wished to know the format in which it had been held and what the results had been.
86. Referring to the statement by the Administrator of UNDP, he asked how follow-up to conferences at the country level was related to follow-up at the international level, considering that it was necessary to establish coordination and integration at both levels.
87. **Ms. Blackburne** (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), referring to the lessons learned from the UNDAF pilot phase, said that, with regard to the human element and the participation of agencies in the Framework, the achievement of positive results would require a real change at both the headquarters and field levels, and not simply a compilation of existing programmes. The speakers should refer to the measures that had been envisaged to train staff to ensure maximum implementation of UNDAF activities. Information should be provided on the participation of the specialized agencies and the experience gained from the implementation of the Framework in Viet Nam and Mali, which had been selected as two pilot countries, particularly with regard to the possible future participation of the World Bank.
88. **Mr. Hidayat** (Indonesia), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said it appeared that UNDAF was becoming a kind of panacea in the area of operational activities, but that, given the complexity of the issues involved, it was necessary to be extremely cautious. While the importance of coordination was clear, there was a danger that the resident representatives would be overly involved in coordination, to the detriment of their responsibilities for executing United Nations plans and programmes, with the waste of human and financial resources that that would entail. Furthermore, if the results showed within 5 or 10 years that UNDAF was not as productive as had been expected, that could be harmful to operational activities. In that regard, he recalled the euphoria, perhaps excessive, that the country strategy notes had elicited, and the fact that not all countries had such notes.

89. It was necessary to place UNDAF in its proper perspective; what was most important was the role that Governments should play, and that they should be able through UNDAF to mobilize resources for operational activities. The question arose, moreover, of how long it would take to formulate an assistance framework in a given country, bearing in mind that there were 137 countries to work with and that the assistance frameworks were different in each country. In addition, he would be grateful for information on whether steps had been taken to give a social dimension to the assistance framework in all receiving countries.

90. **Mr. Rohner** (Observer for Switzerland) noted with satisfaction that the common country assessments were regarded as essential tools for the preparation of the assistance frameworks; since the experience gained in 18 countries was now being analysed, he wished to know what specific benefits had been derived from the assessments.

91. It was true that the assistance frameworks were not a panacea. They were useful tools which should be adapted to national criteria and to the specific experiences of on-site teams; hence, they could not be formulated in the same way for all countries. It was also true that it would be overly ambitious to expect all United Nations organizations to participate in UNDAF from the beginning; however, they should all be invited and allowed to participate when they were willing and able to do so, without delaying the process.

92. **Mr. Prendergast** (Jamaica) stressed the role of Governments and the need to take into account the characteristics of each country. In view of the limited experience of the pilot phase, it would be useful to know the panellists' views concerning the real prospects for UNDAF and its institutionalization, as well as the obstacles that had been encountered at that stage in the establishment of the assistance frameworks.

93. **Mr. Tomasi** (France) said that it was necessary in the first place to consider the costs of the UNDAF process and the system of resident coordinators. While it was understandable that the UNDAF process would require time and effort, it must be recognized that its costs stemmed from the diffuse nature of the system. Each fund, programme and agency had developed its own programming methods and projects, and that was why the task of coordination required substantial effort. In addition, a cost-benefit analysis should be done, and it was to be hoped that the assistance frameworks would produce ever greater benefits at lower cost.

94. For most of the 18 countries participating in the experimental phase, a document had been prepared which

it must be assumed had been analysed by the United Nations Development Group. His delegation wished to know whether that analysis had given rise to common objectives, clear priorities and a greater division of labour, so as to lay the groundwork for common programming.

95. **Mr. Khare** (India), after commending the UNDAF process, said that since his country had been one of the countries included in the experimental phase, it had obviously participated in the process up to a certain point. In his view, UNDAF had been designed to prevent duplication and to support the development priorities of the developing countries. Bearing in mind that the coordination of development activities and external assistance was the responsibility of Governments, it was necessary to ensure that they were the ones controlling UNDAF, which, in turn, required the full participation of Governments at all stages of the process from its inception.

96. It would be useful to know how questions which did not relate to a specific organization, and those relating to organizations that were not represented in a given country, were dealt with in UNDAF. He wished to know what UNDAF contributed to the United Nations system in terms of added value.

97. It was also unclear how UNDAF ensured that the relations which a Government had established with specific United Nations programmes and organizations would not be marginalized by the attempt to establish a single cooperation mechanism. That was particularly important in big countries where many programmes and agencies operated.

98. With regard to resource mobilization, his delegation shared the views expressed by Indonesia, Bangladesh and Morocco.

99. Lastly, it should be noted that even in countries where UNDAF was being carried out in its experimental phase, there was only one document, however important it might be. Inasmuch as the impact of that document on operational activities and, above all, on the development of the receiving countries would be known only after a few years had elapsed, it was preferable not to make value judgements about UNDAF for the time being, but to express the hope that it would prove useful for the receiving countries and for their relations with the United Nations.

100. **Mr. Kebede** (Ethiopia) said that his country, like any other country, had its own development strategy and intersectoral programmes which had been developed in consultation with the United Nations, the World Bank and regional banks, institutions which had a clear-cut role in those programmes. Accordingly, it was difficult to grasp the

specific role of UNDAF in countries where clear-cut development strategies and investment programmes already existed. He wondered whether such cases did not give rise to duplication.

101. **Ms. Bellamy** (Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund), replying to the comment made by the representative of Indonesia to the effect that UNDAF could not be viewed as a panacea, pointed out that none of its proponents had suggested that it was perfect. The results of the experimental phase had been said to be positive in the sense that there had been relatively broad participation during the formulation of the assistance frameworks. It was true that some deficiencies had been noted. It had been observed, for example, that Governments should have been more involved from the very beginning of the process, including in the preparation of the common country assessments; that a way must be found to involve civil society and non-governmental organizations; and that UNDAF should be introduced gradually, so that experience could be absorbed as the process unfolded, and the lessons learned could be applied to the planning of future activities.

102. She also wished to point out that assistance frameworks should not be confused with country programmes. UNDAF was a conceptual tool designed to give greater coherence and unity of purpose to the programming of United Nations operational activities at the country level, while country programmes were clearly associated with their respective funds and programmes and each one had to be adopted by the corresponding executive board.

103. The United Nations Development Group (UNDG) had raised other questions in the context of the Secretary-General's reform proposals. For example, with regard to the relationship between strategic frameworks and UNDAF, it was possible that UNDAF would be replacing strategic frameworks, since it was better suited to development activities. The UNDAF process had barely begun: it had been launched on the basis of the Secretary-General's recommendation; preliminary guidelines had been drafted; and its structure was now being established. There was still no final analysis of cooperation with the Bretton Woods institutions; however, it seemed that the results of cooperation in Mali and Viet Nam had been positive.

104. Lastly, in response to the question posed by the representative of the Dominican Republic, she clarified that each programme had taken specific assistance measures in the countries affected by Hurricane George.

105. **Ms. Sadik** (Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund) acknowledged that the United Nations Development Group had not devoted sufficient time to

organizing briefings and providing guidance on the follow-up of international conferences. Although the item had been included in the agenda of the Economic and Social Council for the past two years and had been addressed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination, there were no recommendations, for example, on how to proceed, or on how to draw up common indicators that could be applied to a number of conferences, or separate indicators in the case of others. Perhaps the linkages among the various conferences could be established with a view to formulating general guidelines. An evaluation of the pilot phase of the development assistance frameworks had established that there were also no guidelines on how to utilize conference-related material and that there had been no instructions on how to elaborate a common programme in consultation with Governments.

106. Much remained to be done with respect to the simplification and harmonization of standards and procedures. Within UNDG, there was a task force that dealt with the matter. It was to be hoped that, once UNDAF was accepted, current procedures could be replaced, making it possible to reduce the excessive workload. Another disadvantage was that the funds donated for certain countries were not allocated to UNDAF but rather to the resident coordinator system.

107. One of the shortcomings brought out by the evaluation was that the headquarters were not sending a unified message; consequently, interpretations at the country level had been varied. Training programmes and briefing sessions should have been organized for country teams.

108. A number of delegations had enquired about the real value added of UNDAF. One of its advantages was that it would contribute to the establishment of a common database in the country, for the country and with the country, which was a basic tool for a useful situation analysis; the common country assessment was one such element. Another advantage was that, through UNDAF countries received assistance in designing a common approach to situation analyses of priority sectors or needs. Despite their common approaches, the situation analyses contained the views of each stakeholder in development.

109. Since the evaluation had brought out that Governments had not participated sufficiently in UNDAF, an effort was being made to define the role they could play. Thematic working groups, which must evolve from forums for the exchange of information to decision-making bodies, had been extremely valuable in some countries, particularly in the education sector, in which the stakeholders had elaborated coordinated and integrated programmes. Much

more could be done in the health sector, and in intersectoral areas as well, if difficulties with regard to accountability, resources and the differentiation of the mandates of the funds and programmes could be ironed out.

110. The question of the participation of the specialized agencies had been addressed, including with the Secretary-General. She agreed with the Observer for Switzerland that the participation of all entities of the United Nations system would be overwhelming. While it was important for Governments and other entities to set priorities, the competent agency and the United Nations should have sole responsibility for policy-making. Lastly, she was not aware that there had been problems with the Governments of the 18 countries which had participated in the pilot phase.

111. **Mr. Powell** (Director of the Strategy and Policy Division of the World Food Programme) said that, in terms of lessons learned thus far, guidance had been given by the creators of UNDAF themselves. In that connection, he referred to the UNDAF document on Viet Nam, which gave an account of the experience and the practical difficulties encountered in the process. In that same context, there was every indication that the participation of the World Bank had been extremely positive.

112. Regarding the substantive questions to be considered in the joint meetings of the various executive committees, there should be an exchange of ideas with the overall aim of moving away, as soon as possible, from the general delivery of assistance to another, more differentiated modality based on dialogue. That modality would involve specific action targeting specific groups of people.

113. Another problem was the reintegration of returnees — both refugees and internally displaced persons — which was also a substantive question relating to the process. Additional substantive questions included the need to defend principles, particularly in the fields of human rights and women's equality; the difficulties of working with a national authority that was not always easy to identify; community involvement in decision-making and the implementation of decisions; and the assignment of adequate personnel to the right place at the right time. Still other considerations included monitoring the safety of personnel and obtaining sufficient financing for rehabilitation, emergency or development measures.

114. Explaining why there was not greater participation by the specialized agencies, he said that the question had been raised by the Executive Director of WFP in the past two sessions of the Economic and Social Council; perhaps it would be more appropriately dealt with by the members of the Committee and the executive boards. Nevertheless,

problems of collaboration and coordination should be considered, particularly in connection with specific questions of interest to delegations.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.